
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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Feb. 15, 2011

Office of the Premier

B.C., MONTANA AND PARTNERS UNITE TO SUSTAIN FLATHEAD

VICTORIA – The Province has signed an agreement to sustain environmental values in the Flathead Valley, and will introduce legislation to support the 2010 MOU on Environmental Protection, Climate Action and Energy with the State of Montana.

“This agreement will ensure the healthy eco-system that exists today in the Flathead River Basin will continue to be maintained in a manner consistent with current recreation, forestry, guide outfitting and trapping uses,” said Premier Gordon Campbell. “This agreement would not have happened without the hard work of Ambassador Gary Doer and Governor Schweitzer, former Minister of Intergovernmental Relations Naomi Yamamoto, Kootenay East MLA Bill Bennett and senior federal politicians and officials on both sides of the border. I want to thank them as well as the Nature Conservancy of Canada and The Nature Conservancy for their support for the 2010 MOU.

Premier Campbell went on to acknowledge the parallel efforts in the United States to retire existing oil and gas leases in the Montana North Fork Flathead Basin, and to introduce legislation to prohibit any future mining, oil and gas leases consistent with the MOU.

The Flathead River Valley in southeast B.C. adjoins the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. The Flathead River is one of North America’s last wild rivers, and the area supports a variety of carnivores and a diverse collection of plants and fish.

Under the Agreement on the Protection of the Transboundary Flathead Watershed Area, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in the United States will contribute \$9.4 million to implement the environmental protection provisions of the MOU, including compensation for current coal and mineral tenure holders for their past exploration.

“The bio-diversity of Glacier National Park and Biosphere Reserve, which is part of the world’s first International Peace Park and a World Heritage Site contained within the valley, will be protected for future generations,” said Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer. “Our MOU identified permissible land uses, and defines our relationship as neighbours acting in concert to ensure the preservation of this unique area.”

With grants made possible by the Nature Conservancy of Canada through the government of Canada’s Natural Areas Conservation Program, and The Nature Conservancy in the U.S., the agreement supports the permanent removal of mining, oil and gas, and coal exploration and development provided for by the B.C.-Montana MOU.

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British Columbia has agreed to maintain its high conservation standards to protect the bio-diversity of the Flathead Valley and other sustainable natural resource uses. The B.C. Flathead Watershed Area has been successfully managed for logging, recreation, guiding and outfitting, and trapping, for over 70 years that has maintained the healthy and diverse eco-system that exists today.

“I congratulate all the proponents who were part of this historic agreement between B.C. and Montana,” said John Lounds, president and CEO of the Nature Conservancy of Canada. “Nature overlaps national boundaries, and it’s heartening to see international partners work together to protect shared fish, wildlife and water. The Nature Conservancy of Canada is proud to take a leading role in this effort.”

Mark Tercek, president and CEO of the Nature Conservancy said, “Conservation does not stop at the border and neither does the Flathead River. We are honoured to support this historic agreement that ensures that both people and wildlife within this remarkable landscape will have clean and abundant water for generations to come.”

Kathryn Teneese, who formally witnessed the signing of the 2010 MOU on behalf of the Ktunaxa Nation Council, said, “We are so pleased that the partnership that began with the 2010 MOU is moving ahead. The Ktunaxa Nation looks forward to joining our other partners in realizing the full potential of this historic program.”

The governments of British Columbia and Montana will continue to work in concert to ensure that the Flathead Valley and its native species are protected for future generations.

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A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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CONSERVATION AGREEMENT SIGNED BY B.C. AND PARTNERS

Under the Agreement on the Protection of the Transboundary Flathead Watershed Area, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and The Nature Conservancy will contribute \$9.4 million to implement the environmental protection provisions of the MOU between British Columbia and Montana, including, but not limited to the cost of addressing existing mineral, oil and gas, and coal tenures.

As part of the agreement, the Province undertakes to continue its best efforts to implement the MOU as a framework for future co-operation in the transboundary Flathead, including:

- Introduce a bill to legislate the legal and regulatory measures the Province took in February 2010 to prohibit the exploration for and development of mining, oil and gas, and coal in the B.C. Flathead Watershed Area.
- Actively seek to participate and partner with other governmental and appropriate non-governmental participants in Canada and the United States to address climate change and other stressors to wildlife species and habitats in an integrated fashion within the Northern Rockies and Columbia Basin, including the Transboundary Flathead Watershed Area.
- Keep in place provisions for conservation and sustainable management in the B.C. Flathead Watershed Area, consistent with the Province's Southern Rocky Mountain Management Plan.
- Subject to funding from others, accelerate planned development of Wildlife Habitat Area designations in the B.C. Flathead Watershed Area for Gillett's Checkerspot, bull trout, cutthroat trout, badger, bighorn sheep, western screech-owl and Williamson's sapsucker before December 2014.

To view the 2010 B.C.-Montana MOU, go to:

<http://www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca/Download.axd?objectId=721>

To view a map of the Transboundary Flathead Watershed Area, go to:

<http://www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca/DisplayEventDetails.aspx?eventId=513>

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